

KATMAI

Seeing Katmai

Katmai is 290 air miles southwest of Anchorage. Daily commercial jet flights connect Anchorage with King Salmon. Travel from King Salmon to Brooks River is by amphibious bush aircraft.

Every day a four-wheel drive "bus" travels over a winding trail from Brooks River to the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. The trail ends on a hill overlooking the valley. A foot trail descends into the valley and to the edge of volcanic deposits. Ranger-naturalists accompany the tour groups.

You can travel by small boat to many parts of the monument. Concessioner boats will take you on fishing and scenic tours to any part of Lake Naknek. You may wish to go ashore to explore the beach, forest, or tundra.

Charter aircraft are available at King Salmon for scenic flights when the weather is favorable. You will see the bays, fjords, and waterfalls of the rugged coastal section, and in the mountain region glacier-clad mountains, smoking volcanic peaks, and the jade-green crater lake of Mount Katmai. Your flight passes over the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes and deep, narrow gorges that have been eroded in the volcanic deposits. In the lake region, you will see island-studded bays, alpine lakes, and the great expanse of Naknek Lake.

Accommodations and Facilities

Wien Air Alaska (4100 International Airport Road, Anchorage, AK 99502) provides accommodations and services at Brooks River and Lake Grosvenor. Package tours from Anchorage are available from June 1st until Labor Day.

Facilities at Brooks River Lodge on Naknek Lake include a modern lodge and cabins with plumbing. Meals are provided at the lodge. The bus tour to the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes begins here. Facilities at Lake Grosvenor Camp include a dining room and cabins without plumbing.

Fishing equipment and guide-operated boats can be rented at both Brooks River and Lake Grosvenor.

Your Introduction to Katmai

At Brooks River Lodge, Park Service ranger-naturalists lead hikes and walks and present evening programs to introduce you to Katmai. Visitor information is available at the Brooks River Ranger Station.

Maps and books about Katmai and on volcanology, geology, biology, and geography are available at Brooks River Lodge. For a price list write the Alaska National Parks and Monuments Association, P.O. Box 7, King Salmon, AK 99613.

Weather and Clothing

Summer high temperatures average 63°F and low temperatures average 44°F. Strong winds and sudden, gusty rainstorms known as williwaws frequently sweep the area. The sky is clear about 20 percent of the summer.

Katmai, a land where glacial ice and volcanic fire meet . . . realm of the Alaska brown bear and the bald eagle . . . a wilderness park embracing the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, dormant and active volcanoes of the Aleutian Range, island-studded lakes fringed with coniferous forest, alpine streams and braided rivers, and a coastline of fjords, bays, and surf-pounded beaches.

Katmai National Monument is both a recreational retreat and a scientific laboratory; it is a place to study, to explore, and to discover unspoiled nature. It is a home for wildlife; and it is a mecca for the curious, the adventurous, and the seeker of beauty.

Your first foray into Katmai will probably be through Lake Naknek, which is part of a system of rivers, streams, marshes, ponds, and elongate lakes formed in valleys eroded by glacial ice. Naknek, largest of the lakes, is bordered by mountains that rise 3,000 feet above its pumice beaches.

The lower slopes of these and other mountains of the lake country are blanketed with dense stands of spruce and birch. The forests merge into the tundra of the higher slopes, where wildflowers abound in summer.

The lake country's array of wildlife includes the Alaska brown bear, moose, beaver, arctic tern, and bald eagle. This vast watershed drains through the Naknek River into Bristol Bay, an arm of the Bering Sea.

Beyond the lake region is the backbone of the peninsula, the ice-shrouded Aleutians. Glaciers carve the slopes and valleys of these volcanic mountains, some of which emit smoke and steam. Major eruptions can be expected at any time on the Aleutian Peninsula. Mt. Mageik, Mt. Martin, and Mt. Trident have erupted in recent time. Novarupta Volcano and the ash-filled Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes are evidence of the forces at work in this dynamic land.

The mountains of the Aleutians rise 7,000 feet above the seas of the Shelikof Coast. Deep bays, rock shoals, wide beaches, sheer cliffs, narrow fjords, and intricate coves are part of the 100-mile coastline. Beyond the beaches and the bays, the land opens into wide valleys separated by the rugged mountains. Sea lions, sea otters, seals, moose, brown bears, bald eagles, and many other animal species live along the coast.

Amalik Bay



Volcanic deposits, Letha River, Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes.



Man, too, has occupied the Katmai area since 2400 B.C. Wood and sod Eskimo igloos last occupied about A.D. 1200 have been excavated. Eskimo villages were located at good hunting and fishing sites and were connected by trails. One prominent trail joined Katmai Village on the Pacific coast with the villages of Savonoski and Naknek in the Bristol Bay area. This trail was used by Russian hunters and missionaries as early as 1750 and later by American explorers.

Volcanic Activity

In June 1912, a violent volcanic eruption quickly changed the Katmai area. Severe earthquakes rocked the area for a week before Novarupta Volcano exploded with tremendous force. Enormous quantities of hot, glowing pumice and ash were ejected from Novarupta and nearby fissures. This ash and pumice flowed over the terrain at incredible speed. All living things in its path were destroyed. Trees on the slopes were snapped off and carbonized by the blasts of hot wind and gas. Within minutes more than 40 square miles of lush green land were buried under volcanic deposits as much as 700 feet deep.

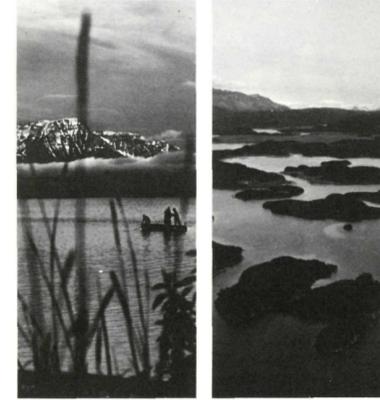
For several days ash, pumice, and gas were ejected into the atmosphere. Fine ash covered the ground for many miles and a haze darkened the sky over most of the northern hemisphere.

As the days passed, Novarupta gradually became dormant. In the valley, innumerable small holes and cracks developed in the ash deposits, permitting steam and gas to escape. These fumaroles formed in most parts of the ash deposits. No living thing remained in the valley. The Eskimo trails had been obliterated; the villages in the vicinity had been abandoned. Only the winds and the hiss of steam could have been heard.

The Ukak River has cut through volcanic deposits in the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes



Fishermen, Naknek Lake. Bay of Islands, Naknek Lake.



The Katmai region remained deserted until 1915, when the National Geographic Society began exploration of the area. Dr. Robert Griggs and his associate, Lucius Folsom, discovered the ash-filled valley where steam rose from countless fumaroles. They named this place "The Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes." Four major expeditions were made to the area of volcanic activity.

As time passed, the deposits of ash and sand consolidated into tuff, a type of rock. The thousands of smoking fumaroles cooled and ceased smoking. Today only a few active volcanic vents remain at the head of the valley.

Since the eruption, the turbulent Ukak River and its tributaries have cut deep, narrow gorges through the ash deposits. Life is slowly returning to the valley. Plant-supporting soil has begun to form, and small pioneer plants struggle to grow in the fringe area. Grass and alder have appeared around scattered small ponds. Moose and bear cross parts of the valley and a few species of birds may visit some areas in search of food. With the invasion of the area by plants and animals, the process of succession of plant-and-animal communities has begun.

Today most volcanoes of Katmai are dormant. Under the quiet valley floor, deep beneath the mountains, molten rock is present. Plumes of smoke rising from mountains such as Mt. Mageik, Mt. Martin, and Mt. Trident indicate the potential for new eruptions. Major eruptions have deposited ash in the Katmai area 10 times during the past 7,000 years. During the last two decades, Mt. Trident has erupted four times, the last in 1969. An eruption bringing major change to Katmai could occur any time. This is a dynamic landscape.

Plants

In the lower elevations of Katmai, forests of white spruce, balsam, poplar, and birch are mixed with thickets of alder and willow and grasslands dominated by blue joint and bluegrass. Many hills and knolls are covered with blueberry, crowberry, and dwarf birch. At higher elevations only low-growing plants typical of the Arctic tundra survive the cold climate, strong winds, and short growing season.

Where thick ash deposits occur, as in the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, plants are scarce. Lichens and other pioneer plants are beginning to appear where soil and moisture are present.

Animals

The varied plant life and Katmai's great diversity of habitats provide food, protection, and breeding grounds for many animal species. More than 30 species of land mammals have been observed at Katmai.

The Alaska brown bear is the most prominent mammal at Katmai. Most brown bears weigh between 500 and 1,000 pounds; larger animals are occasionally seen. In this natural system they may be observed in most of the park from early spring until late fall. The Alaska brown bear is omnivorous, but the bulk of its diet is grass, roots, and other vegetation. During late spring and early summer these bears eat carrion, and in mid-summer and autumn they fish the streams for spawning salmon or feast on wild berries.

Moose live in most parts of the coastal and lake regions. Their diet consists of willows, water plants, and grasses.

Coastal waters abound with marine life. Sea lions, hair seals, and sea otters are often seen.

Red fox, arctic fox, wolf, lynx, and wolverine are predators that help control the rodent population and

maintain a balanced and viable community of plants and animals. River otter, mink, marten, weasel, and beaver make their home in the forest and pond areas of the lake region.

Plentiful nesting sites and abundant food, such as berries, seeds, and insects, make Katmai a favorable habitat for birds.

Whistling swans, ducks, loons, grebes, and terns nest on lake edges and in marshes. Grouse and ptarmigan are plentiful in the upland areas. More than 40 species of songbirds spend their summers at Katmai. Along the coast, sea birds are abundant.

Bald eagles, hawks, falcons, and owls nest on rock pinnacles and tree tops along the seacoast and lake shores.

The fresh-water lakes and streams in Katmai are important spawning grounds for several salmon species. Each summer nearly a million salmon return to the Naknek system after spending several years in ocean waters. These salmon complete their life cycles by laying eggs for new generations.

Wildlife and People

Katmai is a wildlife sanctuary. *Wild animals are not pets.* Bear, moose and other wild animals are unpredictable and can be dangerous. Wild animals will protect themselves, their young, and their territory if they are approached too closely. Potential conflicts with wildlife can be reduced if you:

1. Do not walk toward bear, moose, or any animal.
2. Keep ample distance between you and wild animals.
3. Do not feed any wildlife.
4. Keep all food sealed to reduce odors; use food caches.
5. When camping, don't sleep near cooking areas.
6. Always be alert and cautious—never surprise animals—and make noise when you hike.
7. Use a telephoto lens to photograph wildlife, instead of disturbing the animals and endangering yourself by trying to get within close camera range.

Bears become annoyed when startled. Most trails in Katmai were made by bears. When you walk any place, announce your presence, make lots of noise.

Hiking and Walking

The back country of Katmai offers rewarding experiences for those who take reasonable precautions and make ample preparation. There are several good hikes of a few miles and unlimited opportunities for long-range backpacking trips.

There are few trails in Katmai, but good routes are generally located along river bars, lake shores, and gravel ridges.

Day hikers should have sturdy hiking boots with good support, good gear, and warm clothing.

Detailed written information on hiking is provided through a free publication.

Steller sea lions.



Administration

Information on Katmai obtained by the post-eruption expeditions led to the establishment in 1918 of the National Monument. Boundary changes in subsequent years added a portion of the ocean coastline and the lake system, and made possible better protection of the wildlife. The monument now embraces about 2,800,000 acres. It is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is P.O. Box 7, King Salmon, AK 99613, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

